Cross-curricular teaching and learning 5: Definitions

My book has defined cross-curricular teaching and learning in the following way:

A cross-curricular approach to teaching is characterised by sensitivity towards, and a synthesis of, knowledge, skills and understandings from various subject areas. These inform an enriched pedagogy that promotes an approach to learning which embraces and explores this wider sensitivity through various methods.

I will justify this definition in two ways. Firstly, by considering some of the key words with the definition; secondly, by drawing together some of the themes from the previous four posts.

1. Sensitivity, Synthesis and Subjectivity

These are key words in the definition. They refer to the ways in which teachers should approach the knowledge, skills and understanding inherent within every curriculum subject. These are exemplified in curriculum documents but also have a historical legacy that is underpinned in various ways, not least in teachers’ and others’ conceptions about a particular subject and how it should be taught. Understanding this is a vital step that needs to be taken before moving into collaborative curriculum ventures.

These words also refer back to the act of teaching. In other words, they are important, informing teaching principles that impact on learning. Cross-curricular teaching is not about weakening and watering-down subjects in any way. Rather, it is about the development of an enhanced pedagogy that a skilful teacher adopts for the explicit purposes of enhancing teaching and learning. This leads on to the second set of key words.
2. Enriching, Embracing and Exploring

The new, enriched pedagogy of cross-curricular teaching will embrace and explore the teacher’s sensitivity towards, and synthesis of, the different knowledge, skills and understanding within curriculum subjects. In order for this to happen, there are at least two premises: firstly, teachers will need to understand their own ‘intrinsic’, and their subject’s, ‘subjectivities’; secondly, teachers will need to ensure that their subject knowledge is extended beyond their own subject areas. When this occurs, teachers will be in a position to develop a cross-curricular approach to learning that utilises a range of methods or techniques in line with the following principles and purposes.

The Principles of Cross-Curricular Teaching and Learning

Cross-curricular teaching and learning is:

- Based on individual subjects and their connections through authentic links at the level of curriculum content, key concept or learning process, or through an external theme/dimension;
- Characterised and developed by individual teachers with excellent subject knowledge, a deep understanding of their subject culture and a capacity to reconceptualise this within a broader context of learning beyond their subject, and with sensitivity towards other subject cultures;
- As much about the development of a skilful pedagogy as anything else;
- Coherent in its maintaining of links with pupils’ prior learning and experience;
- Contextualised effectively, presenting opportunities for explicit links with pupils’ learning outside the formal classroom;
- Demanding in its use of curriculum time and resources, requiring flexibility and often needing the support of
senior managers if collaborative approaches are to be implemented effectively;
- Underpinned by a meaningful assessment process that is explicitly linked to, and informed by, the enriched pedagogical framework;
- Normally collaborative in its nature, requiring meaningful and sustained cooperation between subject teachers with support from senior managers.

**The Purposes of Cross-Curricular Teaching and Learning**

The purposes of cross-curricular teaching and learning flow from an understanding of the definition and principles described above. As with the principles, these purposes benefit teachers and pupils alike. The purposes of cross-curricular teaching and learning are to;

- Motivate and encourage pupils’ learning in a sympathetic way in conjunction with their wider life experiences;
- Draw on similarities in and between individual subjects (in terms of subject content, pedagogical devices and learning processes) and make these links explicit in various ways;
- Provide active and experiential learning for pupils;
- Develop meaningful co-operation and collaboration between staff leading to the dual benefits of curriculum and professional development;
- Contribute towards a broad range of teaching and learning opportunities located within individual subject teaching, across subjects and in relationship to specific external curriculum themes or dimensions;
- Promote pupils’ cognitive, personal and social development in an integrated way;
- Allow teachers the opportunity to evaluate and reflect on their teaching and be imaginative and innovative in their curriculum planning;
- Facilitate a shared vision amongst teachers and managers through meaningful collaborations at all levels of
Cross-curricular teaching and learning 4: Whose responsibility?

Who is responsible for developing approaches to cross-curricular teaching and learning? Is it the responsibility of the whole school through the implementation of a whole school policy or strategy? Or is it the responsibility of individual subject teachers and their relationships with other teachers or wider local networks that encompass other professionals?

The short answer is that all of the above can play a part in developing approaches to cross-curricular teaching and learning. There is a shortage of data about how the recent curriculum changes in England have affected teachers’ perceptions on this issue, but one survey by OFSTED (2008) presents some interesting findings related to how schools can successfully manage innovation in the curriculum.

OFSTED’s survey of 30 schools indicated that at the whole school level there were four main categories of curriculum innovation. These included organising the curriculum around themes that were developed through different subjects. For some of these secondary schools, the thematic organisation was not subject orientated, but rather focused on a particular cross-curricular dimension or learning competence:

Themes based on cross-subject or inter-disciplinary approaches incorporated the appropriate development of skills, as in the following example. During Year 7, every pupil completed six
projects, each lasting half a term, on the themes of ‘journeys’, ‘identity’, ‘positive images’, ‘art attach’, ‘survival’ and the ‘the power and the glory’. These drew on geography, history, religious education, dance, drama, art, and personal, social and health education. The pupils were able to assess their development against defined competencies, weekly or in individual lessons. As a result, they gained an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses which provided a powerful stimulus to learning and raising standards. (Ofsted 2008, pp.9-10)

For other schools, a thematic approach meant that a major theme, such as the impact of rivers on environmental, social and economic development, was chosen and explored from a range of subject perspectives. Skills, knowledge and understanding within each subject were orientated around the chosen theme.

In all the schools that Ofsted surveyed, subjects were taught discretely for part of the time. From the perspective of the individual teachers, Ofsted noted that they:

*Emphasised the importance of thorough and detailed planning that identified, unambiguously, progression in knowledge of the subject and the development of skills. They also identified clearly how, when and by whom the work would be assessed.* (Ofsted 2008, p.9)

Approaches such as those identified by Ofsted in this survey were only effective when there was a high degree of co-ordination from the either a group of dedicated teachers or when they were initiated and sustained by a senior manager with a responsibility for the curriculum at the appropriate Key Stage. They are unlikely to happen by chance. The survey is quite clear that strong leadership at all levels is essential for successful curriculum innovation of this type. However, at the level of the individual teacher and the work that is undertaken within that teacher’s classroom, there is much more that can be done.
Cross-curricular teaching and learning 3: The current curriculum context

The situation facing teachers today is one of considerable change. The recent introduction of a new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 has, in one sense, learnt a lesson from history and is being implemented over a three-year period (2008-11). Key documents from the QCA have outlined the key changes in terms of function and design (QCA 2008a & b). Each subject has a new programme of study containing elements such as Key Concepts, Key Processes, Range of Study and Curriculum Opportunities. More generally, the ‘big picture’ of the curriculum (QCDA 2009a) illustrates the vast number of curriculum elements that need to be considered. Individual subjects are just one small part of this.

Of particular importance for our consideration, is the inclusion of what have been called ‘cross-curricular dimensions’. In what has a striking resonance with the historical overview presented above, these (at the time of writing) ‘non-statutory’ elements of the curriculum cover the following areas:

Identity and cultural diversity;
Healthy lifestyles;
Community participation;
Enterprise;
Global dimensions and sustainable development;
Technology and the media;
Creativity and critical thinking.
Accompanying guidance from the QCDA (QCDA 2009d) outlines the purpose of these cross-curricular dimensions. They have been chosen because they reflect some of the major ideas and challenges that face us and will help make learning ‘real and relevant’ (QCDA 2009d, p.1). Additionally, the dimensions:

- Are unifying areas of learning that span the curriculum and help young people make sense of the world;
- Are not subjects, but are crucial aspects of learning that should permeate the curriculum and the life of a school [my italics];
- Add a richness and relevance to the curriculum experience of young people;
- Provide a focus for work within and between subjects;
- Are interdependent and mutually supportive. (QCDA 2009d, p.1)

For all these reasons, one might have thought that these dimensions should have been made statutory. Perhaps the QCA are wary of some of the developments that recent history has taught them about overloading teachers with too much bureaucracy. However, time may have shown that some teachers would have sought to prioritise their work elsewhere were it not for a second, important development in the individual subject programmes of study.

A closer look at individual subject’s programmes of study reveal important new emphases on collaborative, cross-subject working. In every subject’s ‘Wider Opportunities’ statements you will find references like:

- Work on problems that arise in other subjects and in contexts beyond the school (Mathematics 4d);
- Develop speaking and listening skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects (English 4f);
- Make links between science and other subjects and areas of the curriculum (Science 4k);
• Make links between geography and other subjects, including citizenship and ICT, and areas of the curriculum including sustainability and global dimension (Geography 4i).

These subject references to cross-curricular opportunities are particularly helpful and represent a significant shift in the curriculum orders. They are, of course, statutory and a plethora of advice about how to implement these (and other) changes has been produced for teachers (QCDA 2009b). As an example, one of the QCDA guides on sustainable development (QCDA 2009c) includes very detailed planning materials about the learning objectives, typical teaching activities, advice on how individual subjects can contribute to the teaching of the dimension and more. It exemplifies many of these through numerous case studies drawn from primary and secondary schools.

Alongside the cross-curricular dimensions and the individual subjects’ Programmes of Study, there are other statutory elements of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 that all teachers have to embed within their teaching. These include Functional Skills in English, mathematics and ICT and the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS). Both these sets of skills and competencies will require teachers to make imaginative links between their subject’s knowledge, skills and understanding and other areas of knowledge. This has many similarities to what we might consider a more traditional cross-curricular set of teaching and learning approaches.

So, every teacher in every subject at Key Stage 3 is charged with developing a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning. It is the law.

**The Current Curriculum Context: Key Stage 4**

At Key Stage 4, the situation is a little more complex. The revision of the National Curriculum here only includes the
core subjects but, as in Key Stage 3, each contains references to cross-curricular ways of working. For example:

- Analyse and evaluate the impact of combining words, images and sounds in media, moving-image and multimodal texts (2.2i);
- Develop speaking and listening/reading/writing skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects (4.1f, 4.2f & 4.3f);
- Work on problems that arise in other subjects and in contexts beyond the school (4d). Science (in the Explanatory Notes)
- All pupils develop their ability to relate their understanding of science to their own and others’ decisions about lifestyles, and to scientific and technological developments in society.
- Most pupils also develop their understanding and skills in ways that provide the basis for further studies in science and related areas. (DCSF/QCDA 2007, p.221)

Additionally, there are also references to cross-curricular working with Citizenship (4j), ICT (4h) and PE (4f) as well as the non-statutory Economic Wellbeing and Financial Capability (4k) and Religious Education (4i).

Alongside these references within the Programmes of Study, additional components of the curriculum such as Functional Skills and Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (all of which extend the learning covered by pupils in Key Stage 3) present opportunities for cross-curricular practice.

But perhaps the biggest innovation at Key Stage 4 has been the introduction of the Diploma qualifications. These have resulted in a significant shift in the ways in which teachers from different subject specialisms are required to work together. As an example, the Creative and Media diploma contains elements from subjects such as music, visual arts, textiles, fashion, drama, dance, film and more; Travel and
Tourism will involve subjects such as geography, history, economics, ICT, etc. In addition, each Diploma has Functional Skills and PLTS built into the assessment framework. Teachers working on these new Diplomas have had to collaborate extensively on the design and delivery of new schemes of work that relate to the specific principal, specialist and additional learning strands. This is further complicated by the need to include elements of work-based learning and the need to support an independent student project with appropriate subject specialist input. Teachers are needing to become more flexible in their approach to their subject and how it relates to these emerging qualifications. It is interesting to note that ‘collaborative working’ is one of the key areas the Training and Development Agency, together with Lifelong Learning UK, have identified as needing further professional development for teachers working within these new qualification frameworks (TDA/LLUK 2008, p.11).

Sir John Dankworth

We will miss Sir John Dankworth. There are going to be numerous tributes to his work over the following weeks. Here are two that I really enjoyed reading: Frank Griffith’s in the London Jazz; John Fordham in the Guardian. I remember a fantastic evening at the RNCM last summer when Sir John played with the RNCM big band. He played beautifully, told wonderful stories and coached/complimented/encouraged the other young musicians on the stage in such a humble and sensitive way.
Martin's new book

It was great to receive a copy of Martin Fautley’s new book today. Congratulations on this excellent book Martin. There is lots of value here and I know that music teachers will find it really useful. Assessment is such a contentious area but Martin gives clear, practical advice to music teachers. Basically, music teachers should be making much more use of assessment for learning techniques, periodic assessment and looking at how other subjects handle assessment at Key Stage 3. The QCA has lots of good advice about this on the new National Curriculum website. NAME published a very helpful document written by Dr Martin Fautley (available from their website), and you could also read the book Martin and I wrote on this. Here’s the link.

Cross-curricular teaching and learning 2: A short research review

Courses and subjects that fail to reinvent themselves in the face of new circumstances are liable to decline or disappear. (Kirk et al, 1997)

School subject communities are neither harmonious nor homogeneous and members do not necessarily share particular values, subject definitions and interests. (Jephcote & Davies
The diverse memberships of school subject communities create conditions conducive to contest, conflict and tension, both within a subject and between it and other subjects where we need to understand the effects of interaction across a series of boundaries between subject subcultures. (Cooper 1983, p.208)

The main task here is to define the principles and purposes for cross-curricular teaching and learning. To do this effectively, it will be important to consider and learn from a range of broader research that has been undertaken.

Research Review 1: Evidence from recent research within the United

Commissioned by the QCDA, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) has been analysing the impact of recent curriculum changes in the United Kingdom’s schools. Their map of research evidence (2009a) presents some interesting evidence that will help us to develop our principles and purposes for cross-curricular teaching and learning. The key findings from their systematic review identified cross-curricular pedagogies as one aspect of teachers’ practice that was facilitated or hindered by a range of issues. These were:

- The effectiveness of learning that is ‘context based’ (dealing with ideas and phenomena in real or simulated practical situations);
- The importance of connecting the curriculum with young people’s experiences of home and community and the related, but also distinctive theme of parental involvement in children’s learning in the home;
- The impact on pupil motivation and learning of structured dialogue in group work and of collaborative learning;
- The need to create opportunities to identify and build on pupils’ existing conceptual understandings;
- The need to remove rigidity in the approach to the curriculum – to allow time and space for conceptual development, to encourage integration of cross-curricular learning;
- The need for excellence and professional development in subject knowledge – without which teachers would be unable to seize opportunities for curriculum innovation, particularly in relation to context-based learning. (CIDREE 2009a)

Each of these issues is explored further in their review of individual studies (CUREE 2009b). The first point to note is that cross-curricular approaches proved to be effective when they were either ‘context based’ (i.e. centred around a particular theme/dimension) or connected the school-based curriculum with young people’s experiences more widely (e.g. in the home and the community). Secondly, the positive impact of this type of approach on pupils was noted in terms of their motivation, discursive language and potential to collaborate with each other. More negatively, the damaging lack of consideration to how this new approach would build on pupils’ existing ‘conceptual understanding’ was noted. Turning this around, it will be important that new innovation in curriculum planning and development is constructively linked to pupils’ current range of experiences and understanding (their ‘folk pedagogy’ in Bruner’s terms (Bruner 1996)). Thirdly, and at the level of curriculum design, these types of approaches were facilitated by flexibility in curriculum design, by allowing ‘time and space’ for development. Finally, and perhaps most important for our ongoing discussion, the need for excellence in teachers’ subject knowledge is prioritised. The research suggests that this is a vital precursor for curriculum innovation.

Research Review 2: Evidence from the European context
The Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE) produced an interesting European Union wide report into cross-curricular themes in education (CIDREE 2005). Although this report deals primarily with the introduction of cross-curricular themes (e.g. personal, social and health education, citizenship education, etc), it does identify a range of factors that influence the success or failure of a cross-curricular theme (either as a stand alone component within a curriculum or embedded within existing subjects). The research surveyed 27 countries through a range of methods. This research identified a range of key problems in the implementation of cross-curricular approaches.

Firstly, the most common pressure on the successful introduction of cross-curricular approaches to curriculum planning was due to the pressure on school timetables and the overloading of the curriculum itself. As we saw in Chapter 1, these are common problems in the recent history of educational reform in the United Kingdom. The report emphasises that the role of the teacher is paramount in the successful implementation of cross-curricular approaches. But:

Many teachers report a lack of self-confidence with respect to cross-curricular themes (Saunders et al 1995) or they feel themselves ill prepared in addressing these themes (Van Looy, 2002; Arnot & Wilkins cited in Kerr, 1999; Kerr, 2000; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2001). This inadequacy relates to both the lack of content knowledge and to the inability to employ a range of teaching and learning approaches appropriate to the theme (Kerr, 2000). (CIDREE 2005, p.8)

In order to combat teachers’ lack of experience or competence with cross-curricular themes or approaches, the report emphasises that teacher development was reported as the ‘top priority’ for schools in improving their provision. But, this was not easy either:

However, even when teachers take part in in-service training
relating to aspects of, for example personal, social and health education (PSHE), the impact of this training appears to be limited because teachers have insufficient time to put their training experiences into practice (OFSTED, 2001). (CIDREE 2005, p.9)

The report considers some of the reasons for these problems and identifies that, in contrast to traditional subjects, some of these themes lack academic traditions, research and development base’ (ibid). In terms of developing an appropriate pedagogy for cross-curricular teaching the report has some interesting comments from a range of European perspectives:

Research on the process evaluation of the introduction of cross-curricular themes shows that successful introduction requires the usage of active teaching methods which, according to many teachers, is difficult to realise (Stevens cited in Somers, 2001). ... Furthermore, it seems that teachers often insist on the dominance of subject principles in structuring pupils’ learning. This makes teaching the themes through including them in subjects very difficult. (CIDREE 2005, p.9)

As a specific example of this, the report identifies an issue related to language:

Particularly, the rules of use of ‘talk’ in different contexts seem to be one of the key problems (Whitty et al 1994a). Buck & Inman (1993) advocate a form of learning which enables pupils to acquire knowledge through content which is both challenging and relevant and through learning processes which are active and experiential. (CIDREE 2005, p.9)

The extent to which teachers are able to co-operate and collaborate within a school was another important factor in stimulating cross-curricular activities:

There is a lot of evidence that co-operation between teachers and the involvement of all teachers of the same school are
important conditions for successfully implementing cross-curricular themes (Van Looy 2002; Estyn 2002). However, this consultative structure is not always present in secondary schools (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2001) or there is a lack of communication culture (Somers, 2001). Furthermore, members of the school community who are asked to coordinate cross-curricular work in schools, often find it difficult to motivate colleagues and do not have the same influence on their colleagues as school directors usually have (Somers, 2001). (CIDREE 2005, p.10)

The nature and structure of educational resources were next to come under scrutiny. Here, the report criticises resources for a lack of advice about managing collaborative projects and a lack of coherence in the structure and approach:

Hargreaves (1991) states that the task to create coherence within the cross-curricular themes is being largely left to the teachers. This can be explained by the fact that some guidance documents provide insufficient advice as to how teachers might make these links. Moreover, guidance documents seem sometimes to intensify the difficulties since there is no coherence of approach across the different themes (Beck, 1995). (CIDREE 2005, p.10)

Here, the importance of an appropriate assessment methodology is raised:

Students feel that if an aspect of learning is not assessed, it implies that it is of low importance and low relevance to their lives (Walker, 2002). The pre-survey report for European Conference on the implementation of cross-curricular themes reveals that five countries mention the lack of evaluation as an aspect that undermines the status of the themes (Maes, et al. 2001). ... The findings of this report clearly point to the importance of having identifiable evaluation systems to provide appropriate recognition and realization rules for work relating to cross-curricular themes. (CIDREE 2005, p.10)
More briefly, the report is able to identify some positive features for the implementation of a cross-curricular approach. These are that cross-curricular approaches should:

- Demand that pupils pull together appropriate knowledge from a range of subjects and relate it to everyday life;
- Be characterised by an objective and open-minded approach to controversial issues with attention for the quality and quantity of evidence;
- Use concepts as the intellectual building blocks and as essential aids to the categorisation, organisation and analysis of knowledge and experiences;
- Use participatory and experiential teaching and learning styles;
- Deal explicitly with questions and issues that enable pupils to explore fundamental aspects of our lives.

In relation to how schools can be managed effectively to achieve these aims, the report concludes by stating that they are characterised by:

- Having a vision and goals which are well described and with which all participants are familiar with it;
- Aiming at both cognitive and personal and social development of their pupils;
- Making decisions in a participative way;
- Possessing a strong ability to self-assess and innovate.

Cross-curricular teaching and learning 1: A brief, UK-
centric historical overview

I thought I would post a series of six posts on cross-curricular teaching and learning. This has been the topic of a book that I’ve put together for Routledge over the last few months (Cross-curricular Teaching and Learning in Secondary Education). Whilst I want you all to go and buy the book (!), these posts will be a summary of some of the opening ideas that I’ve been considering.

I’m starting today with a brief historical overview of issues relating to cross-curricular teaching and learning from a UK-perspective. It would be great to get feedback on these ideas, particularly from those of you reading outside the UK who have faced different sets of policy/circumstance than over here. So, here we go.

Recent educational policies, initiatives and resulting curriculum frameworks all have a history. It is interesting to take the longer view and consider how these current initiatives have emerged from, or perhaps are distinct from, previous ways of thinking or working. In this section, we will briefly consider a range of issues drawn from literature surrounding the implementation of the National Curriculum in the early 1990s. As we will see, some of the questions and issues being raised then have an interesting parallel to issues being considered today.

The implementation of the first National Curriculum in 1992 was encompassed by an extensive range of discussion amongst educators and politicians about a range of issues. Amongst this discussion, the inclusion within the National Curriculum of what were referred to at the time as ‘cross-curricular dimensions, skills and themes’ was hotly contested. Some of the arguments will be familiar. Dafour, writing in 1990, stated that:
‘Education’ and ‘curriculum’ have not been defined in any previous Education Act, although the Education Reform Act, 1988, which is about both, does depart from this tradition by providing a definition of the curriculum along with a prescriptive list of subjects that must, subsequently, be taught. (Dafour 1990, p.1)

One can sense the tumultuous political arguments that are raging beneath his prose. Within, and beyond, this ‘prescriptive’ list of subjects there were winners and losers, e.g. music was included, drama was not; physical education is there in its own right, dance was not, etc. The sense of politicians ‘meddling’ in the construction of a curriculum was very real at this time. One could cite numerous examples of how individual subject content was changed in response to Government ‘interference’, even at the level of individual Government ministers (Verma and Pumfrey 1993, p.21). Dafour goes on to say that:

While the status and context of different forms of knowledge will continue to be influenced by political and ideological considerations, political partiality should not be allowed to influence the final choice and status of particular subjects and cross-curricular themes for the school curriculum. The only question that should be asked is an educational one – how can all the subjects and themes fit together into the curriculum? (Dafour 1990, p.11)

Unfortunately this was not, and perhaps has never been, the case. Politics and education have a long and troubled history. But as one can see from the second part of this statement, alongside the inclusion of certain subjects, cross-curricular themes were also included within the curriculum framework. The National Curriculum Council defined these themes as:

… elements that enrich the educational experience of pupils. They are more structured and pervasive than any other cross-curricular provision and include a strong component of
knowledge and understanding in addition to skills. Most can be taught through other subjects as well as through themes and topics. (NCC 1989, p.6)

These cross-curricular themes included topics such as economic and industrial understanding, health education, environmental education and citizenship. But in addition to themes, the inclusion of cross-curricular skills such as communication, numeracy, problem solving, information technology and study skills were implemented. Writing in 1993, a year after the introduction of the National Curriculum, the prescribed subjects and these various cross-curricular components, Pumfrey commented that:

The sheer rate of change that is taking place in education is unprecedented. The volume of paper reaching schools and requiring responses is daunting, even to the most committed professional. The core and other foundation subjects are currently centre-stage. Unless teachers and schools are vigilant, the benefits of cross-curricular themes could be adversely affected.

At present, the National Curriculum is far from fully in place in schools. The way in which various subjects are cross-curricular themes have been introduced into the secondary school syllabus has not been of the highest order. Too little preparation and consultation have led to controversial changes. (Pumfrey 1993, p.21)

As we will go on to see, in respect of implementing cross-curricular elements within a wider curriculum framework, little has changed in twenty years! The position facing teachers today is that the inclusion of cross-curricular dimensions within the new secondary curriculum is non-statutory. Given the raft of other new initiatives, this sends a strong message to teachers about where their priorities might lie. Crawford (2000) considers the role of policy makers and their relationship to practitioners in a fascinating
study. At the level of the individual teacher who in the early 1990s, as we have seen, was struggling to make sense of these monumental changes in curriculum policy and design and had to side-line cross-curricular themes in favour of core subjects, he quotes Ball who stated that ‘teachers were reduced to agents of policies which were decided elsewhere’ (Ball 1990, p.171). Perhaps there is nothing new there either. But more generally, whilst Crawford’s belief is that the then Department for Education and Science was not against the principle of whole curriculum initiatives (i.e. an approach that blended together subjects with cross-curricular themes), his concluding thought is that ‘the debate over the whole curriculum is representative of a conflict over the strategy of curriculum implementation’ (Crawford 2000, p.628).

In summary, this tumultuous period demonstrated many things. Firstly, the marriage of subjects and cross-curricular themes within the curriculum is not an easy one. Secondly, the imposition of large changes in curriculum design often mean that teachers will focus on what they know, i.e. their subject, and not make the wider links that might have been envisaged by a ‘whole curriculum. Finally, although the benefits of a cross-curricular set of themes and skills were recognised by politicians and educators, the practical implementation of the curriculum itself meant that opportunities were missed and creative links were established between subjects or between subjects and cross-curricular themes.

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**Updating that library thing**

I’ve had a day of catching up on things that I’ve been meaning to do for a while but haven’t got around to. One of them was
updating some of the books I’m reading on the [Library Thing](http://www.librarything.com) website. It’s been a while since I’ve visited the site but I highly recommend it as a way of keeping track of your books and finding out about related reading through other users of the service. They have added a lot of extra functionality since I last visited and increased the number of books you can have on your virtual shelves (to 200), but I’m nowhere near that yet. Anyway, the widget in the right hand margin shows what I’m currently reading. Why not create an account of your own and let the world know what’s on your bookshelf?

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**Time to say farewell to the NAGTY**

I’ve noted today that the National Association for Gifted and Talented Youth is to be scrapped. You can read more about it [here](http://www.nagty.org.uk), together with a range of views from various people about whether or not this is a welcome move.

My view is that supporting gifted and talented pupils is, firstly, an essential part of an individual teacher’s role. Their pedagogy needs to be broad enough to ensure that all children are challenged at all stages of their education. This is not a simple task when you are faced with large classes containing mixed abilities, but it is possible (**and my book will show you how**)!

But organisations like the NAGTY had a part to play in providing a service to schools in helping them support their gifted and talented pupils. However, in the current financial climate it is no surprise that cuts like this are being made. Within the field of music education, I am going to bet a
significant sum that the current (one might say extravagant) funding that certain initiatives have received is going to be slashed, if not cut completely, over the next 12 months or so, whichever party comes to power in the May election.

New report on the benefits of instrumental learning

It was good to see this report covered on the BBC website late last week. To my knowledge, the FMS has commissioned the first piece of evaluative work into the Wider Opportunities programme. It is an interesting study and well worth a read (although I can’t find the full report on the FMS website yet).

In some senses, there are no surprises here at all. The report endorses the Wider Opportunities approach to instrumental learning, even hinting that whole class tuition is as effective as small group tuition. On second thoughts, perhaps I should have been surprised by that if I reflect back over the longer term of instrumental teaching in schools?

Obviously, I’m a firm advocate for the benefits of a music education for all children. But I do worry that pieces of research/evaluation like this sometimes over-step the mark. I’m really not sure that claims about pupils’ self-esteem being raised through participating in Wider Opportunities, and the benefits that this has on their wider studies, can be validated in what seems like a short-scale evaluative study. Surely a longitudinal study of some sort is needed for that? But, the research seems to have been funded by the FMS, Yamaha and other musical groups so perhaps its findings are not that
suprising. The key recommendations made be laugh out loud. What do you make of this selection:

1.2 Planning and programming of WO should be more open to input and decision making from children; Why?

2.5 Continued financial and resource commitment to schools and music services is needed to meet the rapid growth in demand for WO music provisions; No surprise there! Nothing like having a bit of research to back up your claim for more money from an ever-decreasing pot.

3.4 Strategic targeting towards broader improvement in initial teacher education for class teachers; Easy to have a pop at classroom teachers. We’ve seen that before fairly recently.

3.5 Encouraging greater parity of training and pay and conditions across music services; In other words, lets pay unqualified instructors the same as qualified teachers. After all, what’s the difference?

Bit cynical? Maybe. What do others think?